

Madeira's Autonomic Insignias: A Historical Overview of the Coat of Arms and Armorial Achievement

The adoption of Madeira's coat of arms in 1978 was a pivotal moment in the archipelago's history, symbolizing its political autonomy and regional pride. Following the granting of political autonomy in 1976, Madeira sought to establish a distinct identity separate from mainland Portugal while remaining within the framework of the Portuguese Republic. In many newly autonomous regions, symbols like coats of arms become crucial for expressing political autonomy and fostering regional pride. Madeira was no exception. The coat of arms and banner of arms, a symbol of regional pride¹, represent the archipelago's historical identity and the region's political aspirations after self-governance. However, the adoption process was shaped by considerable political discourse, reflecting tensions between Madeira's still main ruling pro-autonomy party, which sought to emphasise the region's distinct identity, and the Opposition, which was more inclined towards maintaining a closer relationship with mainland Portugal.

The push for greater autonomy in Madeira was a response to political, social, and economic factors brewing throughout the 20th century. Historically, Madeira's geographical status often left it marginalised in national political decision-making² as a strategic maritime outpost for Portugal and a territory that generated more revenue for the Portuguese treasury than it received in investments or support³. This neglect was exacerbated during the authoritarian *Estado Novo* regime (1933-1974), where the central government maintained strict control⁴ over its "adjacent islands", of which the Archipelago Madeira was part as an Autonomous District and Portugal's colonial overseas territories. While the island experienced some economic growth, Lisbon had always dictated local governance, accumulating a well-documented resentment among the population throughout the centuries⁵.

The fall of the *Estado Novo* regime during the Carnation Revolution of 1974 catalysed a shift towards greater democratic freedoms, decentralisation, and political reorganisation in Portugal. Within this new climate, calls for autonomy intensified in Madeira, where local leaders reignited the arguments that the archipelago should have the power to manage its affairs, especially regarding fiscal policy and economic development. The post-fascist national government responded by granting autonomy to the region through the Portuguese Constitution of 1976, a document that would lay the foundation for Madeira's regional legislative assembly and executive government, marking a significant turning point in the region's history.

This newfound autonomy soon raised a fundamental question: how would Madeira express its distinct identity within this semi-independent framework? Symbols, particularly a coat of arms, played a crucial role in articulating regional pride and a sense of belonging, especially for the ruling Social-Democratic Party (PPD)⁶. In 1978, Madeira's Legislative Assembly formally adopted⁷ a coat of arms, reflecting its unique culture, history, and geographic position. The choice of symbols, however, would represent the archipelago's heritage and its relationship with mainland Portugal, with the need to balance regional self-assertion and national unity shaping the design and approval process⁸.

When Madeira's coat of arms was adopted in 1978, it symbolised the region's newfound political autonomy and distinctive identity within Portugal. The design had to balance the representation of Madeira's unique cultural and historical character while acknowledging its ongoing relationship with the Portuguese Republic.



Miguel Silva Reichinger Pinto Correia, 10/09/2024. Ver: Figure 1 - FLAMA's flag, Wikicommons

The parliamentary process of adopting the new coat of arms (and the flag - a 2:3 banner of arms, which is quite rare in the Portuguese civic and state heraldic and vexillological traditions⁹) was marked by tense political debate, spanning two consecutive days¹⁰, with discussions of the insignia centring on issues of autonomy, separatism, Portuguese identity, and the evolving relationship between the archipelago and mainland Portugal. Politically, the discourse was charged, as Opposition¹¹ voices raised concerns that these symbols, particularly the flag's colours, encouraged separatist sentiments and even promoted terrorism.



Figure 2 -Madeira's Flag, Wikicommons

The coat of arms (and flag) designed by Jardim and approved by PPD's supermajority in Madeira's Legislative Assembly did follow¹² the flag design of the Madeira Archipelago Liberation Front (the *Frente de Libertação do Arquipélago da Madeira—FLAMA* was a paramilitary, separatist, terrorist, and anti-communist group active between 1974 and 1978¹³) blazoned as: *Azure*, a pale *Or* charged with five escutcheons in cross *Azure* each charged with as many plates in saltire (i.e. Portuguese *quinas* or *quincunx*).

For FLAMA, the metal and tinctures symbolised the island (or the Archipelago) in the middle of the ocean, while the *quinas* alluded to the Portuguese ancestry of the archipelago's settlers, or as someone put it, "the genealogical symbol of our People"¹⁴.

In the end, what came to be the coat of arms approved by Madeira's Legislative Assembly was the proposal of the supermajority ruling Social-Democratic Party (PPD)¹⁵, whose leader and President of the Regional Government, Alberto João Jardim, was behind the original design¹⁶. It reproduced the flag to be adopted: A Portuguese style shield (square top, rounded base) *Azure*, a pale *Or* charged with the cross of the Order of Christ.

However, Jardim replaced the Portuguese *quinas* with the Cross of the Order of Christ to introduce a more apparent Christian symbol, following a conversation with his friend Francisco Santana, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Funchal, who wanted Madeira's flag to reflect its Christian identity. This change served two purposes: it appeased the separatist movement. It resonated with local traditions, as the Cross of the Order of Christ is a common symbol in Catholic demonstrations on the island. Additionally, it symbolised Madeira's first administration under the Order of Christ, led by Prince Henry the Navigator, Duke of Viseu, distinct from the Portuguese Crown's direct rule¹⁷, which only took over the island during the reign of King Edward I of Portugal and the Algarves - an argument later reflected in the regional decree approving the coat of arms.



Figure 3 - Madeira's Coat of Arms, Wikicommons

Notwithstanding the historical context above, the official symbolism of the adopted coat of arms was prescribed and reasoned for in the regional decree approved by Madeira's Legislative Assembly. The legal document¹⁸ argues that "in the ambiguity associated with historical and communal phenomena, the colours blue and gold have come to symbolise the region's identity". It further argues that although separatist movements attempted to appropriate this symbolism for their purposes, it is undeniable that these colours became deeply ingrained within the Madeiran population, an argument that the Opposition did not accept during the Parliamentary debate¹⁹ but later revealed to be confirmed²⁰.

By officially reappropriating the separatists' *Azure* and *Or*, the Legislative Assembly argued that the Autonomous Region fulfilled a fundamental collective desire for autonomy while simultaneously "dismantling the separatists' mystification".

The same regional decree ascribed the official symbolism for the tinctures: “*Azure* reflects the natural environment that defines the island’s insularity, while, in heraldic terms, it signifies nobility, formality, and serenity. *Or*, symbolises the region’s mild climate—so crucial to its economy—carries heraldic connotations of wealth, strength, faith, purity, and constancy”. Despite this official narrative, it is essential to note that the metal and tincture of Madeira’s coat of arms are also found in the charges of Portugal’s century-old coat of arms: the castles and the *quinas*²¹.

Despite the approval of the coat of arms through the supermajority that Jardim held in Madeira’s Legislative Assembly, the main Opposition party in the Legislative Assembly, the Socialists (PS), presented a counter-proposal that was stricken immediately by the ruling party²².

Because the leftist parties (PS and the Marxist UDP) firmly associated *Azure* and *Or* with FLAMA, PS presented counter-proposals to the flag and coat of arms that avoided these. Coincidentally, the cross of the Order of Christ was the only point of consensus between the three parties due to the solid Christian heritage of the people that the pro-autonomy²³ Bishop of Funchal spoke of.

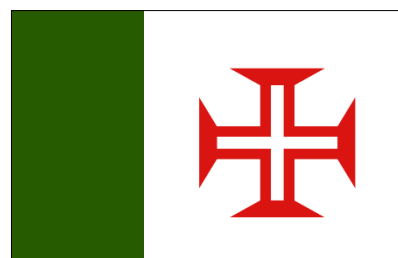


Figure 4 - Madeira's Socialist Party flag proposal, Wikicommons

The Socialists’ proposal for the flag, accused by Jardim of being a “copy” of the Algerian flag²⁴, featured two pales, one *Vert* occupying a third of the field and another pale *Argent* occupying two-thirds of the field charged with the cross of the Order of Christ.

As for the coat of arms, the Socialists opted for the following blazon: a circular shield *Argent*, a cross of the Order of Christ within a bordure *Vert*²⁵. The Socialists’ counter-proposal argued in favour of a circular shield, typical of the first reigns²⁶ of the House of Aviz (1385-1580), the Portuguese Dynasty of which Prince Henry the Navigator was a member.

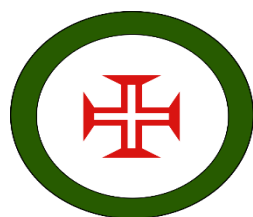


Figure 5 - Madeira's Socialist Party coat of arms proposal, Wikicommons

The main argument behind the Socialists *Argent* and *Vert* proposal concerning the symbology of the mental and tinctures was extensive. Still, the central theme behind it was “Portugueseness” (in Portuguese: *Portugalidade*), a word usually defined as a quality of being Portuguese, something specific to Portuguese culture, a feeling of love or affection for Portugal, or even as an adjective.

The Socialists contended²⁷ that, beyond *Azure* and *Or* being seen as “separatist,” these colours were already used by several island jurisdictions, such as the Canary Islands and Barbados. In contrast, they argued that *Vert* symbolised Madeira’s Laurissilva Forest and the island’s famous greenery, which had attracted tourists since the 19th century. It represented calmness, tranquillity, peace (as noted in scientific arguments during the parliamentary debate), hope, and a connection to Portuguese identity. As for the cross of the Order of Christ in a white background, the reasoning was more straightforward: it was an allusion to the flags of the Portuguese caravel, the Age of Discoveries and a nod to the flags used to decorate church festival venues across the archipelago. Jardim strongly condemned such Algerian similarity in parliamentary debates to the point that it was questioned if PS supported Algeria’s annexation of the recently created Autonomous Region²⁸.

Despite the arguments exchanged during the parliamentary debate, neither the President of the Regional Government of Madeira nor other members of Madeira’s Legislative Assembly highlighted that the flag

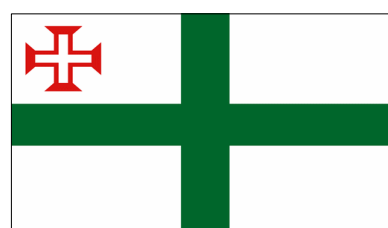


Figure 6 - Standard of the Portuguese Navy's Commander-in-Chief of the Fleet. Source: Wikicommons

and coat of arms proposed by the Socialist Party closely resembled those of the Portuguese governmental and military standards²⁹ adopted during the First Portuguese Republic³⁰ and the Estado Novo regime³¹, and still in force. These insignias heavily combine *Vert* and *Argent* with the Portuguese coat of arms. Adopting such designs could be interpreted as symbolically placing Madeira under the Portuguese national government's or its military's direct authority³², contradicting the archipelago's recently acquired constitutional, political and administrative autonomy.

While Madeira's coat of arms was initially adopted in 1978, two Portuguese academics initiated a debate for its revision: first Francisco de Simas Alves de Azevedo, a member of the Portuguese Academy of History and the International Academy of Heraldry, in 1988 and later, in 1990, Rui Alexandre Carita Silvestre, Professor Emeritus at the University of Madeira.

Azevedo argued³³ that although the coat of arms (and banner of arms) was of excellent heraldic design, they lacked external ornaments of an armorial achievement, namely: a helmet, a torse, a crest, a mantling, supporters or tenants, and a motto.

In Azevedo's view, the lack of external ornaments was not admissible given that the sister Autonomous Region of the Azores had adopted a full armorial achievement. Being both regions within the same constitutional category and honour (above a municipality and endowed with legislative and executive bodies with extensive powers), their coats of arms should match when it comes to external ornaments.



Figure 7 - Armorial Achievement of the Autonomous Region of the Azores, as approved in 1979. Source: Wikicommons

Azevedo's heraldic proposal for both Autonomous Regions emphasised using a knight's helm instead of the municipal mural crowns mandated by Portuguese law³⁴ as a symbol of sub-national entities endowed with political and administrative autonomy; this, together with the inclusion of banner-bearing supporters to draw inspiration from the heraldic traditions of Canadian provinces and English county councils, reflecting, a broader influence from international models of regional governance. *Estado Novo's* corporate entities and the military are the only cases of Portuguese heraldic precedents³⁵ in using the helmet (together with crest, wreath, and mantling) outside of Portuguese civic heraldry and personal heraldry.

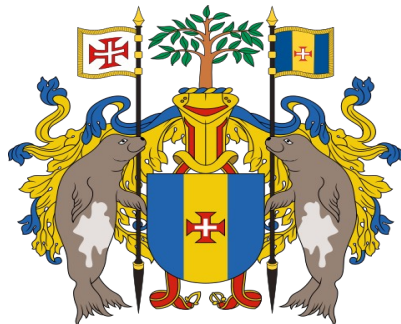


Figure 8 - Azevedo's proposal of armorial achievement from 1988. The crest being a laurel tree (*Laurus novocanariensis*) proper, added by the present paper's author, Wikicommons

Azevedo suggested that Madeira's armorial achievement should feature a tree (or tree stump or log) in the crest, canting the name of the Archipelago, as "Madeira" means "wood" in Portuguese. For supporters, he recommended two Mediterranean monk seals (*Monachus monachus*), one holding the banner of the Order of Christ and the other the Madeiran arms. The Archipelago's largest mammal, monk seals, were occasionally used in place of the royal-sanctioned^{36,37} wolves in the coat of arms of the House Câmara, whose founder, João Gonçalves Zarco, discovered Madeira.

Looking back to Azevedo's heraldic arguments concerning the proposal for both Autonomous Regions, whereby he advocated the elm of knight (instead of municipal mural crowns prescribed by Portuguese Law) to symbolise a sub-national jurisdiction

doted of political and administrative autonomy, together with banner-holding supporters may have been inspired by the coats of arms of the Canadian Provinces and English county councils, where the helmet and not the mural crown is the norm. Expanding on Azevedo's arguments from a heraldic history perspective, Carita published the seminal proposal that would, one year later, strongly influence Madeira's current armorial achievement. In its 1990 article published in *Isleña* magazine, the university professor argued that the Azorean precedent and Madeira's constitutional dignity of Autonomous Region called for an armorial achievement, which he proposed and detailed as follows:

- The **helmet** ought to be a frog-mouth helm facing outwards *Or* facing outwards and lined *Gules*. The reason was that said type of helmet belonging to King João I, who ordered the settlement of Madeira, was still preserved in Lisbon's Military Museum.
- The **crest** ought to be an armillary sphere *Or*. On this charge, Carita argued that it was more aesthetically pleasing than repeating the shield's main charge (the cross of the Order of Christ), a common practice in Portuguese heraldic tradition³⁸ and that it was also an instrument linked in the historical period during which Madeira was discovered being reflected in the period's architecture still standing on the island.
- The **mantling** ought to be *Azure* doubled *or*, reflecting the shield's tincture and metal, blazoned as per standard Portuguese heraldic tradition.
- The **torse (or wreath)** also *Azure* and *Or*.
- The **guige strap**, a standard fixture of Portuguese heraldic tradition linking the helmet and the shield and usually blazoned, especially within Portuguese military heraldry³⁹, was proposed to be *Gules* and lined *Or* to symbolise strength.



Figure 9 - João Gonçalves Zarco Statue, after which Carita's artistic rendition of the tenants is strongly influenced. Source: Wikicommons

In addition to the elements previously mentioned, Carita's proposal for a complete armorial achievement included two Portuguese navigators as the preferred **tenants**, modelled after the statue of João Gonçalves Zarco located in the centre of Funchal, Madeira's capital. As Azevedo proposed, one of these figures would carry the Order of Christ's banner. At the same time, the other would hold a banner *Argent*, five escutcheons in cross *Azure*, each charged with as many plates in saltire (i.e. the *quinas*), as the symbol of Portuguese ancestry and heritage.



Figure 10 - The Coat of arms of the House of Câmara as depicted in the Livro do Armeiro-Mor, the oldest and most important roll of arms of the Kingdom of Portugal.

Source: Wikicommons

Carita viewed Azevedo's inclusion of the monk seal as disproportionately emphasising the municipality of Câmara de Lobos, where the Portuguese first encountered the animal, thereby giving undue prominence to the House of Câmara, who unlawfully adapted, from time to time, their arms to feature said animals.

Lastly, Carita's proposal aiming for an armorial achievement also introduced a **motto** containing a stanza from a Portuguese epic poem written by Luís Vaz de Camões about Madeira: "*Das que nós povoámos a primeira*". The motto translated into English would be "Of those we populated the first", but if one is aiming for a more poetic interpretation, perhaps Richard Francis Burton's translation⁴⁰ is more fitting: "Where first our people made their fortunes cast". Although Carita's proposal aimed for a complete armorial achievement, inspired by Azevedo's, it fell short of two main elements: a compartment (which could have been, for example, compartment half of grass and half of ocean)



Figure 11 - Insignia of the Medal of Merit of the Autonomous Region of Madeira.

on which the tenants would stand and the symbol of Madeira. The Medal of Merit of the Autonomous Region of Madeira awarded by the Assembly and created through Regional Decree n. 3/79/M, on March 17, 1979. Source: Wikicommons

Notwithstanding the above, the following year, PPD, holding once more a supermajority in Madeira's Legislative assembly, introduced a bill concerning armorial achievement. A proposal that combined Carita's and Azevedo's proposals and which ended up being approved⁴¹, again with solid criticisms by some of the Opposition.

The blazoning, as approved by Madeira's Legislative Decree and taking into account the artistic rendition accompanying the law, is as follows:

- **Arms:** *Azure* a pale *Or* charged with a Cross of Christ.
- **Crest:** (on a frog-mouth Helm facing forward *Or* and lined *Gules*): An armillary sphere *Or*
- **Mantling:** *Azure* doubled *Or*
- **Torse:** *Azure* and *Or*
- **Supporters:** On either side a Mediterranean Monk Seal (*Monachus monachus*) proper. "Proper" being coloured "dark greyish brown to give the idea of the animal in its habitat. The monk seal's belly has a large, clear, almost white, well-defined patch of irregular shape, contrasting with the colouring of the rest of the body".
- **Guige straps:** *Gules* lined *Or*.
- **Motto:** *Das Ilhas as Mais Belas e Livres* ("Of all islands, the most beautiful and free").



Figure 12 - Madeira's Armorial Achievement as of 1991. Wikicommons

As mentioned, Madeira's armorial achievement was criticised⁴² by the Opposition during a parliamentary debate.

The inclusion of monk seals was viewed by the Socialists (PS) as a symbolic gesture toward the House of Câmara. It was, therefore, seen as neglecting the contributions of other families who played a significant role in Madeira's settlement and economic development. This issue was outlined by Carita's proposal, which the PS mentioned during parliamentary procedures and demanded that the tenants proposed by the academic be restored.



Figure 13 - Monk seal pup showing the distinctive white belly's patch. Photo by: Melina Marcou. Source: Wikicommons

Furthermore, the Socialists firmly opposed the motto "Of all islands, the most beautiful and free", arguing that Camões's stanza had more historical meaning and was less narcissistic than the one being proposed by the ruling party.

On the other hand, the Christian Conservatives (CDS) questioned why the monk seal, one of Madeira's endangered species, was prioritised over other endemic species, such as Cory's shearwater (*Calonectris borealis*) and the common wood pigeon (*Columba palumbus* L.). However, like the Mediterranean monk seal, these bird species are not exclusive to Madeira and have not left the same historical impact on the island's early settlers.

A relatively straightforward political process marked the adoption of Madeira's coat of arms, flag (banner of arms), and subsequent armorial achievement. Initially directed by Alberto João Jardim, this process was later shaped under the guidance of two academics—an expert in heraldry and a professor of art. Despite criticism from Opposition parties across the political spectrum, the ultimately adopted insignia remains in use today. It is prominently displayed on official documents and buildings and is widely recognised and respected by the people of Madeira. However, that is not to say that the armorial achievement is flawed from a Portuguese heraldic perspective.

From both constitutional and heraldic perspectives, the Madeira and Azores cases represent a noteworthy innovation⁴³, as these regions possess the authority to establish and regulate their heraldic standards. Under appropriate legislation, this political and administrative autonomy could even be extended to align with the practices of the Flemish and French Communities within the Kingdom of Belgium, which can regulate heraldry for corporate and private individuals. Notably, neither Madeira nor the Azores possessed their coats of arms during the monarchy, the First Portuguese Republic, or the Estado Novo regime; the latter was actively engaged⁴⁴ in corporate, civic, and colonial heraldry.

The adoption, by the Autonomous Regions, of an armorial achievement in the likeness of Canadian provincial heraldry and English county heraldry featuring helmets and supporters, as defended by Azevedo and Carita, as an alternative to the municipal, colonial and administrative regions mural crowns is justified due to the unique constitutional status of each archipelago.



Figure 14 - Recently enobled's helmet.

Source: Wikicommons

However, it must be acknowledged that the helmets deviate from traditional heraldic norms, particularly regarding the use of forward-facing *Or* helmets, which contravenes established heraldic conventions. While the Autonomous Region of the Azores set a precedent on this matter by adopting a full armorial achievement in 1979 featuring said type of helmet, and because Carita strongly favoured *Or* as an “expression of sovereignty”, said arguments from a constitutional standpoint, could be deemed void. While Madeira and the Azores hold extensive political and administrative autonomy, they are not sovereign nor embody nations in the Portuguese constitutional setting.



Figure 15 - Fourth generation onwards noble's helmets.

Source: Wikicommons

Portuguese heraldic tradition is characterised by specific conventions⁴⁵ regarding the representation of helmets, particularly within the nobility. Typically, a noble's helmet is rendered in *Argent*, adorned with *Or* detailing, such as a ferrule or fillet on the visor and lower edges. The distinction between open and closed helmets is determined by the lineage of the noble: those whose noble status extends beyond three generations are depicted with an open helmet (with the visor raised or barred), while newly ennobled individuals, up to the third generation, bear a closed helmet.

Further distinctions are observed in military and corporate heraldry, which was fairly standardised during the *Estado Novo* regime. Corporate and military heraldry traditionally feature a frog-mouth helmet *Argent*, adorned *Or*, or simply a frog-mouth helmet *Argent*. These practices reflect the formalised nature of heraldic symbolism during this period.



Figure 16 - Frog-mouth helmets favoured by the Estado Novo regime for corporate and military heraldry. Source:

Having said that, Portuguese heraldic tradition followed⁴⁶ that a helmet *Or* in a facing forward position was exclusively reserved for monarchs, princes of royal lineage, and sovereign dukes. Nevertheless, several scholars fail to acknowledge the historical significance of differentiating features on helmets. It is worth mentioning that Jean du Cros, in *Livro do Armeiro-Mor* (c. 1509), utilised silver and gold helmets without any discernible criteria (similarly done by António Godinho later in *Livro da Nobreza e Perfeição das Armas*); however, the Portuguese royal heraldic convention ended up reserving the forward-facing helmet *Or* to those of the Royal Family.

Given the above, the fact that both Autonomous Regions use a forward-facing helmet *Or* does not seem appropriate from a Portuguese heraldic standpoint. An innovative approach would have been, in the author's opinion, to come up with a compromise solution, i.e. a forward-facing helmet *Or* adorned *Argent*, which would symbolically allude to political and administrative autonomy, heraldic innovation and appropriately reflect the unique status of both archipelagos.

Conclusion

The evolution of Madeira's autonomic insignias, from adopting the coat of arms in 1978 to the full armorial achievement in 1991, represents a significant chapter in the region's political and cultural identity. These symbols are more than mere heraldic designs; they encapsulate Madeira's journey towards autonomy and the tensions inherent in balancing regional distinctiveness with national unity. The political debates surrounding creating and adopting these symbols reflect the broader struggle between asserting regional pride and maintaining ties to mainland Portugal and the parties' ideology concerning how autonomy should be symbolically represented. By incorporating elements that speak to Madeira's unique history and, more subtly, Portuguese heritage, the symbols serve as a bridge between local autonomy and national cohesion.

From a heraldic standpoint, the insignias deviate in some ways from traditional Portuguese designs, reflecting the region's autonomy and distinct political status. The armorial achievement, blending traditional symbols such as the Cross of the Order of Christ and more localised elements like the monk seals, is a testament to Madeira's complex historical narrative. Moreover, the influence of heraldic scholars in shaping the final design underscores the importance of these symbols in representing political power and cultural identity.

Ultimately, Madeira's autonomic insignias represent the region's aspirations, struggles, and accomplishments in the post-colonial era. They continue to play a vital role in expressing Madeira's identity within the framework of the Portuguese Republic, embodying both the island's rich heritage and its modern autonomy.

Sommaire

L'article examine le contexte politique et historique de la lutte de Madère pour l'autonomie, qui a abouti en 1976 lorsque la Constitution portugaise a donné à l'archipel une autonomie politique. Cette période de transition a rapidement donné lieu à une recherche de symboles illustrant l'identité régionale unique de Madère au sein de la République portugaise. L'un de ces emblèmes est le blason de Madère, adopté en 1978, qui reflète à la fois la proclamation politique de l'autonomie de l'île et son héritage culturel.

Reflétant la géographie et la culture uniques de Madère, les armoiries et la bannière qui les accompagne ont suscité un débat politique important. Sous Alberto João Jardim, le parti social-démocrate au pouvoir a soutenu les armoiries en tant que symbole de l'identité de Madère. Mais les partis d'Opposition, en particulier les

socialistes, craignaient que les armoiries ne cautionnent des idées séparatistes, car leurs couleurs et leurs emblèmes reflétaient ceux du groupe séparatiste paramilitaire de l'archipel. Ces conflits reflétaient des discussions nationales plus générales sur l'harmonie entre l'autonomie régionale et l'unité nationale.

Le document décrit généralement les discussions législatives alambiquées qui ont accompagné l'acceptation des armoiries. Les voix de l'Opposition ont fait campagne pour des dessins différents, même si le dessin final de Jardim comprenait des éléments reflétant l'héritage chrétien de Madère et les liens historiques avec le Portugal continental. Mettant l'accent sur le caractère national plutôt que régional, les socialistes ont suggéré d'appliquer un dessin évoquant les normes militaires portugaises et le gouvernement national.

En examinant les armoiries d'un point de vue héraldique, l'étude explore également les symboles particuliers choisis. L'écu, dont l'or pâle est chargé de la croix de l'Ordre du Christ, évoque la relation historique de Madère avec l'Église catholique et le contrôle de l'île par les premiers membres de l'Ordre du Christ. Reflétant les coutumes chrétiennes et l'héritage maritime de l'île, en particulier à l'époque des découvertes, cette croix a remplacé les « quinas » portugais figurant sur le drapeau séparatiste d'origine.

Les armoiries de Madère sont devenues une réalisation armoriale en 1991, avec des éléments héraldiques, notamment un casque, un cimier, des supports et une devise. Les discussions académiques menées par des professionnels de l'héraldique, en particulier Francisco de Simas Alves de Azevedo et Rui Alexandre Carita, ont grandement influencé la réalisation finale de l'armorial. En outre, ces universitaires ont soutenu que Madère était un territoire autonome qui méritait des armoiries au même titre que les Açores et le statut unique de Madère. Inspiré par la faune et l'héritage historique de Madère, le dessin final inclut des phoques moines méditerranéens comme supports, soulignant la beauté et la liberté de l'archipel.

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